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Carol X Weakley 09/22/2006 05:07:18 PM From DB/Inbox: Carol X Weakley

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Text:

C O N F I D E N T I A L                    TEL AVIV 03791

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CXTelA:

ACTION: POL  
INFO: IMO IPSC PD RES ECON DCM DAO AMB AID ADM RSO  
CONS

DISSEMINATION: POL

CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: POL/C:MSIEVERS

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CLEARED: NONE

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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6532

INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 003791

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/22/2007

TAGS: PREL PGOV UN IS KPAL

SUBJECT: LIKUD READS QUARTET STATEMENT AS A DIPLOMATIC  
DEFEAT; THE GOI DISAGREES

Classified By: Political Counselor Marc Sievers. Reason 1.4 (B/D)

¶1. (SBU) PM Olmert's plans to meet West Bank settlers next week and his quest to shore up his coalition no doubt prompted some Likud leaders to take issue with the September 20 Quartet statement as a way to flex their political muscles before the Jewish High Holidays begin on September 22. Former Knesset Chair of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, MK Yuval Steinitz, reportedly called on the Olmert government to resign, saying "the decision of the Quartet to support a Hamas government is an unprecedented diplomatic crisis." Steinitz went on to claim that the world is embracing a government comprised of terrorist organizations that are seeking the destruction of Israel.

¶2. (SBU) Former Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said the Quartet statement represented a "diplomatic defeat" for Israel on the grounds that it did not contain an explicit restatement of the three Quartet requirements demanded of a PA government. Shalom's reaction is undoubtedly an effort to tarnish Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni's image, which remains bright in the eyes of the Israeli public according to recent public opinion polls -- even as Olmert and Peretz suffer a precipitous drop in popularity in the aftermath of the Lebanon war.

¶3. (SBU) Olmert's Kadima loyalists, notably Interior Minister Roni Bar-On, quickly responded to Likud accusations about a U.S. retreat by noting no change in President Bush's message to PA President Abbas on September 20 on the need for the PA government to recognize Israel. Foreign Ministry Spokesman Mark Regev, speaking to Israel radio September 22, downplayed the significance of the matter by stating that the Quartet conditions are so well known there was no need for the Quartet to repeat them.

¶4. (C) Comment: The GOI appears to have opted to take the high road in its low-key official reaction to the Likud-inspired brouhaha concerning the September 20 statement. We believe this reflects a policy-level/political decision on the part of the Olmert government to avoid any public appearance of a difference of views with the U.S. administration.

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